

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, CI
SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS: EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE AND
COMMITTEE FOR PEACE

REFS: (A) SANTIAGO 8272 (B) SANTIAGO 8234

1. SUMMARY: BISHOP CAMUS REMAINS AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF CHILEAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE. NEW PRESIDENT OF PERMANENT EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE ELECTED. PEACE COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS TO BE ASSUMED BY A NEWLY CREATED VICARIATE FOR SOLIDARITY. CHURCH SOURCES BELIEVE CHURCH IS NOW IN STRONGER POSITION VIS-A-VIS GOC, AND FIRMLY UNITED BEHIND CARDINAL. END SUMMARY.

2. EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC CHURCH CURRENTLY MEETING IN SOUTHERN CHILE, REJECTED LAST OCTOBER'S RESIGNATION OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE SECRETARY GENERAL CARLOS CAMUS (SANTIAGO 6894), CONFIRMED HIS POSITION FOR REMAINING TWO YEARS OF HIS FOUR-YEAR TERM, AND RESTATED ITS CONFIDENCE IN HIM. CHURCH SOURCES TOLD EMBOFFS DECEMBER 15 THAT ONLY FOUR OUT OF 29 BISHOPS IN ATTENDANCE HAD VOTED AGAINST CAMUS.

3. CONFERENCE HAS ELECTED ARCHBISHOP FRANCISCL FRESNO FROM NORTHERN CITY OF LA SERENA AS NEW PRESIDENT OF PERMANENT EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE. HE REPLACES CARDINAL SILVA, WHO HAD INDICATED HIS DESIRE NOT TO BE RE-ELECTED. FIVE-MAN PERMANENT

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EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE WILL NOW BE COMPOSED OF CARDINAL, CAMUS,

BISHOP MANUEL SANTOS OF VALDIVIA, BISHOP TOMAS GONZALEZ OF TALCA AND FRESNO. BISHOPS CAMUS, SANTOS AND GONZALEZ ARE KNOWN STRONG SUPPORTERS OF CARDINAL. ONE OBSERVER CLOSE TO CHURCH CLASSIFIES FRESNO AS A CONSERVATIVE CHURCHMAN. OBSERVER COMPLIMENTED CHURCH ON TACTICAL MOVE OF ELECTING A CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN TO PRESENT CHURCH VIEWS TO GOC. PERMANENT EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE FORMAT HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN CHANGED TO RESTRICT PRESIDENT'S AUTHORITY AND MAKE IT FORMALLY MUCH MORE OF CONSENSUS BODY THAN WHEN CARDINAL WAS PRESIDENT. IN FRESNO'S ABSENCE IN LA SERENA, CARDINAL AND CAMUS CAN BE EXPECTED TO CARRY ON DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES OF COMMITTEE.

4. COMMITTEE FOR PEACE LAWYER TOLD EMBOFFS DECEMBER 16 THAT DECISION HAS BEEN MADE TO CONTINUE COMMITTEE'S WORK BY CREATING A NEW VICARIATE FOR SOLIDARITY UNDER SANTIAGO ARCHBISHOPRIC (SANTIAGO 8161). SOURCE SAID CURRENT PEACE COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY CRISTIAN PRECHT WILL BE DESIGNATED VICAR TO HEAD NEW ORGANIZATION. COMMITTEE IS TO BE DISSOLVED AS OF DECEMBER 31 BUT WILL ACTUALLY CONTINUE TO OPERATE DURING MONTH-LONG TRANSITION PERIOD TO END JANUARY 31. PHYSICAL LOCATION OF NEW ORGANIZATION HAS NOT YET BEEN DETERMINED. SOURCE BELIEVED THAT MOST KEY STAFF MEMBERS WOULD REMAIN AND THAT PRINCIPAL PEACE COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE CARRIED OUT, ALTHOUGH WITH MORE DISCRETION.

5. DURING CONVERSATIONS DECEMBER 15, CHURCH SOURCES TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THEY BELIEVE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS, AND FACT THAT POPE HAD GIVEN CARDINAL STRONG ENCOURAGEMENT, HAD RESULTED IN MUCH STRONGER UNITY IN AND BEHIND CHURCH.

6. COMMENT: CHURCH CERTAINLY GIVES IMPRESSION OF GREATER UNITY IN SUPPORT OF CARDINAL, WHO HIMSELF IS TAKING FIRM -- ALTHOUGH NOT AGGRESSIVE -- POSITION VIS-A-VIS GOC. WITH DECISION TO DISSOLVE PEACE COMMITTEE, AND PASSAGE OF TIME SINCE SECURITY FORCES MOVED IN ON ITS ACTIVITIES IN AID OF LEFTISTS, CHURCH HAS MANAGED TO EXTRACT ITSELF FROM EMBARRASSING DEFENSIVE POSITION IN WHICH IT FOUND ITSELF

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AT THAT JUNCTURE. GOC, OF COURSE, GAVE CHURCH A HAND BY MAKING ILL-CONSIDERED DECISION TO BAN MAIPU RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE, AND GOC -- OBVIOUSLY SEEKING TO AVOID AN OPEN BREAK -- APPEARS UNSURE OF HOW TO HANDLE CURRENT PROBLEMS.

7. RETENTION OF BISHOP CAMUS AS SECRETARY-GENERAL WAS EXPECTED AND MAY BE READ AS INDICATION OF BISHOPS' RESOLVE NOT TO BE PUSHED INTO TAKING DECISIONS ON BASIS OF GOC

PRESSURE OR HIGHLY SENSATIONALIZED PUBLIC CAMPAIGN. CAMUS' PROBLEMS, IT WILL BE RECALLED, STEMMED FROM UNAUTHORIZED RELEASE OF FRANK, EMBARRASSING COMMENTS ABOUT GOVERNMENT TAPE-RECORDED AT SUPPOSEDLY OFF-THE-RECORD PRESS CONFERENCE SOME WEEKS AGO.

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